



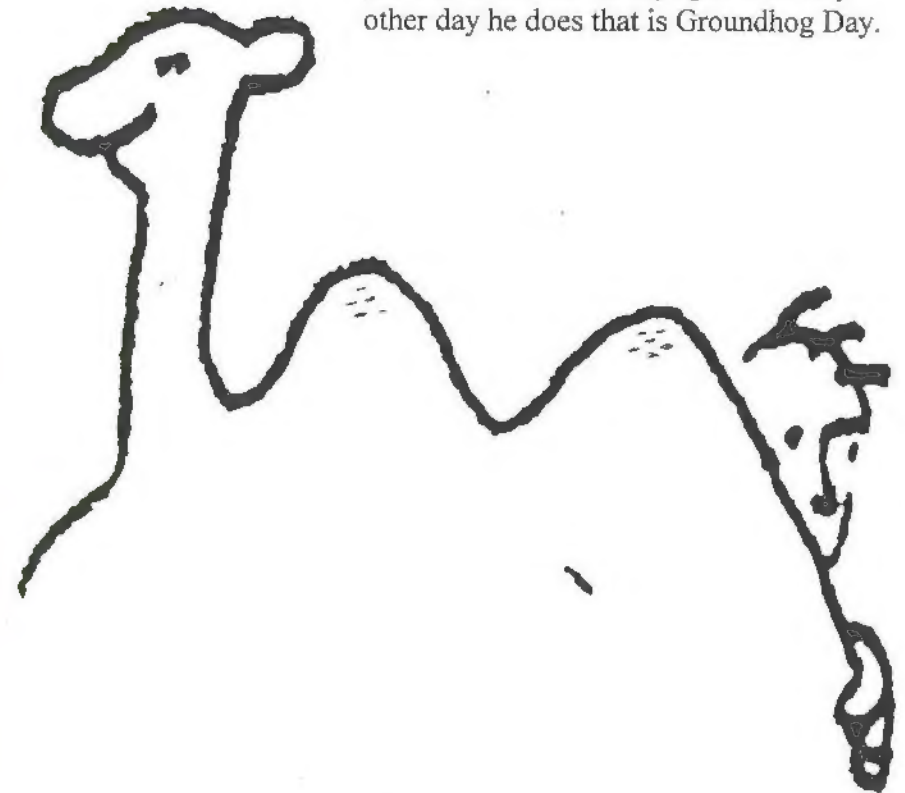
BEZANGO, WA 985 # 4

The town of Bezango, hidden in the Coastal Range of southwest Washington State, has a geographical feature that as far as I know is totally unique. The hamlet is tucked into sort of a box canyon, with only one thin road connecting it to the outside world. The hills that surround Bezango were originally created by underwater volcanoes, then shaped and cut by the ice sheet, which reached it's most southern extreme exactly at this spot. Tons of Canadian rock, mammoth bones, and crud like that were deposited in the natural bowl that would later become our town. This created kind of an underground insulating buffer. Now Bezango is also the epicenter of frequent earthquakes. But, these are quakes that **stay** in Bezango. The natural cushion prevents the seismic waves from spreading, even the closest town of Winnehutt can be unaware of a 7.2 shaker, and that's only 30 miles away as the crow flies, but much longer by road. The waves just ricochet back and forth and back and forth until they play out. So we get several earthquakes for the price of one.

Most of our shakers are mild three-point-fivers, but last year on Dec. 23 we had a seven-point-sixer that lasted no less than half an hour with all the repeating waves! That moment created quite a snapshot of Bezango as the question was asked, "Where were you when the Christmas Eve-Eve Quake hit?"

The Mystik Criver runs through the middle of Bezango and there's ... yes, I said "Criver," don't laugh. It's too big to be a creek, and too small to be a river, so we call it "Criver." It is only in print that it looks weird. If you say it out loud it sounds OK. Anyway, there's a wide spot in the Criver where we have a barge covered with a Divinity scene, plastic reindeer, and various other Yuletide icons. Holiday music (recorded by the McElfresh quindecaplets in 1968) is piped in too. And all this is festooned with colored lights. This inspirational display is called "Christmas Island," and it sits there all year, but only in December are the lights turned on. Some quiet little fellow has set up camp on the Island, and

has lived inside the wisemen's hollow camel for the last few years. The quake forced him to do something quite rare--poke out his head in daylight. The only other day he does that is Groundhog Day.



Some folks like to claim they can predict when an earthquake is going to hit. Barry Thiessen likes to hang out next to the pay phone at the Mountain Beaver Gas Station/Mini Mart/and Lawn Ornament Emporium. Throughout the day he can smoke half a dozen of those foul, putrid, obnoxious, cheap, vile cigars. You can smell him coming from two blocks away. He likes to burn those babies right down to the end. "When I feel my nose hairs starting to singe," Barry claims, "Then I know it is time to stop." At the end of a hard day of hanging out he'll return home to his wife, Mary Thiessen. And he always pops a breath mint into his mouth right before entering the house in the belief this will keep her from complaining about the stench. Mary has had a clothespin clenched on the bridge of her nose for the past several years, and all of us have stopped seeing it, I guess. Especially Barry.

Oh, right, the quake prediction, I almost forgot. Barry claims he can communicate with spirits who manifest themselves in his thick cigar smoke. These spirits let him know when the next earthquake is coming. Funny thing is, he only tells us about these forecasts after a quake hits.



Most of the time Howie Snacklebee will stand on the corner of 3rd and Pingo, lightly dance the tips of his fingers together, and exclaim with a highly strangled smile and tight voice, "Howie Snacklebee gonna buy hisself a Holy toaster." Actually, punch the words on "Snack" and "Holy." "Howie Snacklebee gonna buy hisself a Holy toaster." That's it. Remember the high pinch-pitch. About 30 seconds before a real earthquake, Howie straightens up, and announces in a newscaster-perfect delivery the impending arrival a quake, plus the Richter scale measurement to expect. 100% accurate. Someone said he won a Nobel Prize but I don't know for what.



Nora Sneedmoss, who always enjoys being the epicenter of attention, was pleased the Christmas Eve-Eve quake arrived on her birthday.

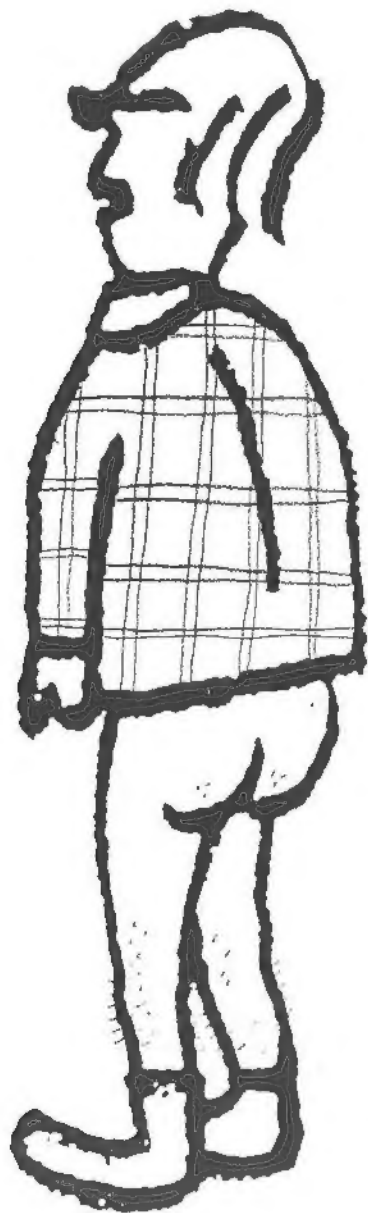


We have a local Santa Claus, Harold "Harry" Hands. The business folks set up a room in the second floor of the "Brick Bump" for the kids to go to and see St. Nick. The rest of the year this room is used for storing dill pickles, so it smells sort of funny. The floor is covered with dust bunnies the size of basketballs and the room is illuminated by a bare 60-watt bulb hanging on a wire. Holiday songs as sung by the McElfresh quindecaplets in 1968 play on a cassette recorder. Harry isn't the most personable Santa Claus, but he was hired by his brother, the Rev. Charles "Grabby" Hands of the New Pedestrian Christian Church (no one calls him "Grabby" to his face) because Rev. Hands thought this job would jolt his brother out of being chronically depressed. After a dozen holiday seasons, this therapy has not appeared to work, but it has provided something a ritual existential loss of innocence for the local children. During the quake Harry and the two or three kids in the room swayed back and forth and watched the bare light bulb swing wildly. The rumbling did not drown out the McElfresh quindecaplets, however. When it was over, Harry told the kids in his monotone drone, "God is punishing us. Go ahead and ask me for material things, but you'll only have your soul when one of these quakes finally bury us." And in the background the McElfresh boys are singing, "Have a holly jolly Christmas ..."



Zuba. When it hit she was being Zuba.
Just like she always was. And always
will be.

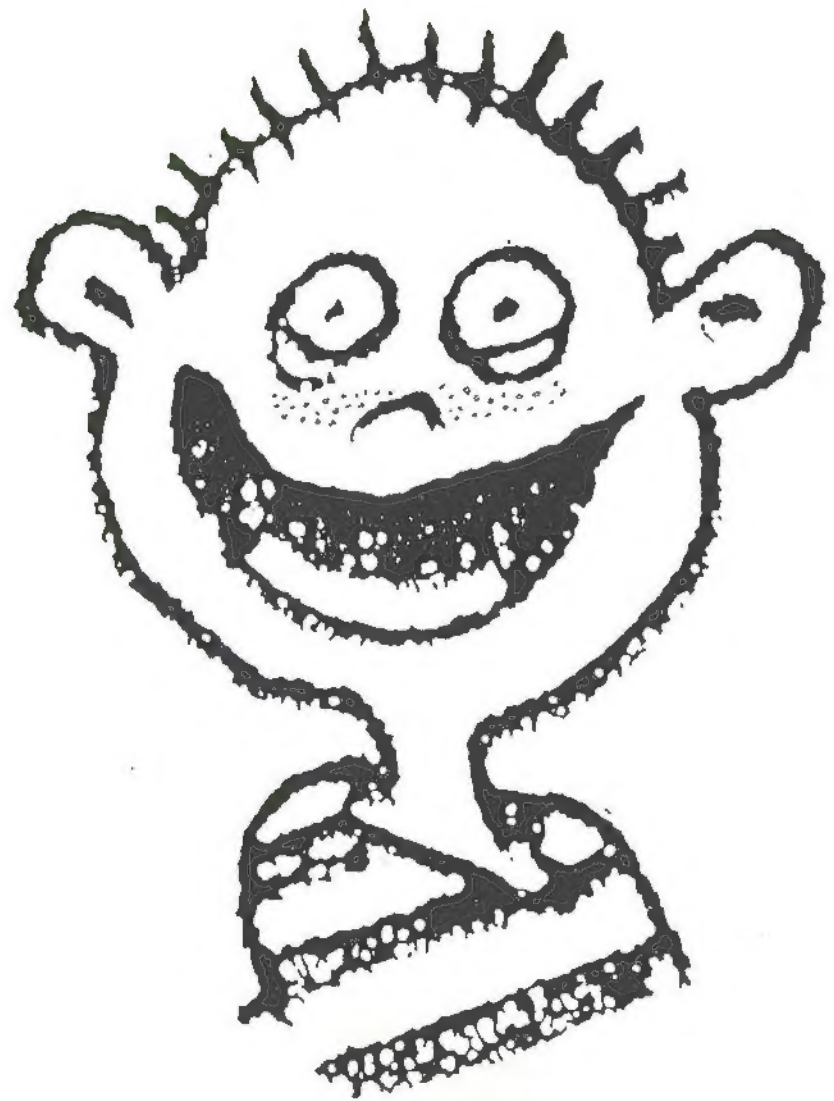
Right when it hit, Waldo Borker was entering the Bezango Cafe in an effort to find a loophole around the "No shirt, no shoes, no service" sign.

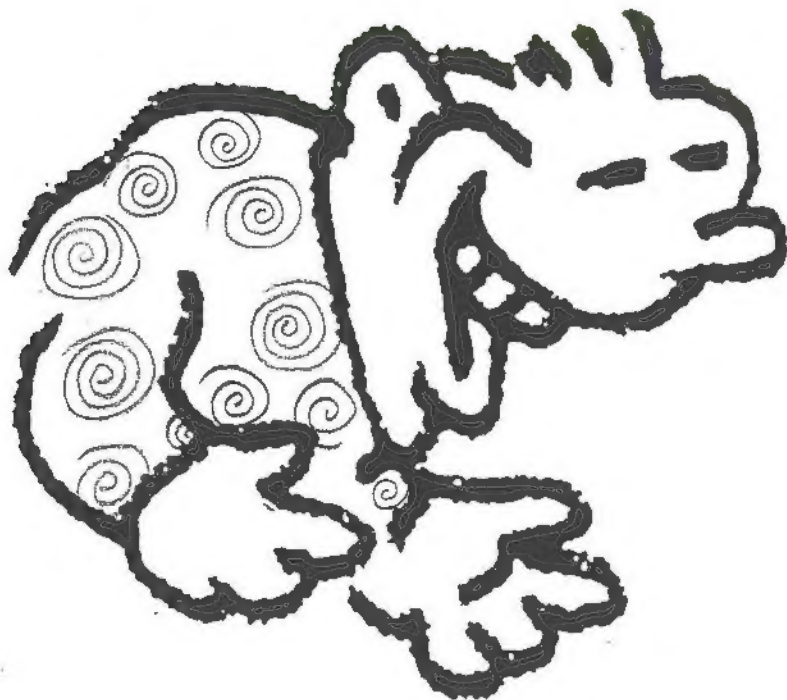


Meanwhile, Fabiola, Bezango Cafe waitress, was calmly taking orders as customers dove under their tables. Fortunately she was not working at her other job as town dentist when the rumbling started.

At the Marion Zioncheck Grade School, Mrs. Uberflumpf's third grade class was presenting a "Parade of Planets" at a school assembly. The children were lined up in the order of the planets, and counting off from the sun, recited their names. The girl with the highest and softest voice was given the role of Earth. Mars was given to Greg Dragon, a weird little guy with a voice like a frog. He really enjoyed the role of the Red Planet, and even wore all red for the day.

Here's what happened, the kids began to snap out their names, "Mercury" ... "Venus" ... and now very softly, "Earth" and then Greg's froggy, loud, and very very enthusiastic voice shouted out "**MARS!**" At that point the Christmas Eve-Eve quake hit. Everyone scattered, except Greg, who froze in position with that big, happy smile still on his face. He stayed exactly that way until New Year's Day.

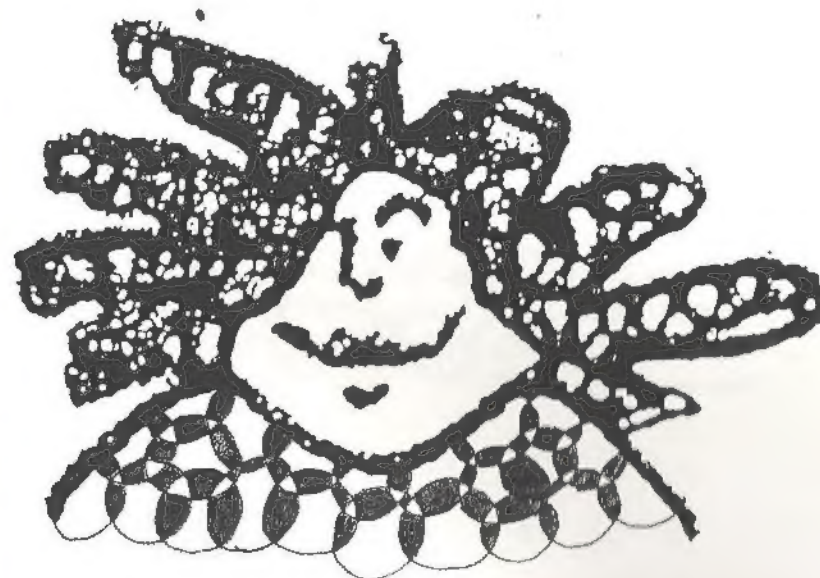




In the Head Loader Tavern, Porter "Belgian Pancake" Googybugg (the origin of his nickname will have to wait for another time) had spent the past hour cheerfully telling everyone in listening range about his surgery (five years ago) that resulted in his getting an artificial rectum. Needless to say, his drinking companions were relieved when the earthquake arrived.

Myrtle Flemm has a fairly rich fantasy life. Whenever there is a dangerous epidemic across the state, like e-coli, she'll shut herself in her house and claim she has it too. She says she dresses in frumpy clothes on purpose to discourage unwanted advances from men, which brings a chuckle from neighbors, "Someone sure has a rich fantasy life," they'll say. Myrtle will profess authorship of several published novels, but we have yet to find one. She speaks with such authority on these things that sometimes we believe her.

When the quake came, she was supposedly on a honeymoon in Hawaii with a husband no one has ever seen. That's what her wedding announcement in the paper said. But as the quake hit, she was seen running out of her house, alone, and into the street. We pretended we didn't see her, and a couple weeks later, when she asked what the Christmas Eve-Eve Quake was like, we played along. She might be a fraud, but she's our fraud.



Raymond McGee is a shingle weaver who has a little shop next to the Mystik Criver. Hey, I told you all about the "Criver" once, don't ask me again. His place is upstream from Christmas Island. Several years ago, he completely severed his thumb while on the job, and was rushed to the Bonker Memorial Hospital, where it was re-attached by old Doc Dragon.

A year later, and all these events took place on Christmas Eve-Eve come to think of it, Raymond did it again. And once more he was rushed to Bonker Memorial, which sits on top of the hill, and yet again old Doc Dragon sewed the same thumb back on.

When the earthquake came, Raymond was pushed right into the saw, and his thumb was lopped off for a third time. "This damn thing is always in the way," he yelled as he threw the severed digit in the Criver. Actually, he said some other words too, but since I know kids are reading this account I'll just leave it at that. As the thumb slowly sank into the Mystik, a large fish was seen snapping it up.

For some reason, no one has gone fishing in the Mystik Criver since then, except for visitors, who wonder why local spectators have an unusual interest in their catch.





At the moment the quake started, Ard Bricker was doing what he always does-- modestly awaiting acclaim. For what, we don't know. But he is waiting even now.